

RIO Task Force Meeting #5 – Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2025, at 7:00PM – Wellesley Town Hall, Great Hall

Task Members Present: Erin Reilly, Amy Gottschalk, Joan Minklei, Marc Charney, Mary Prosnitz, Mary Kloppenborg, Paul Criswell, Heather Sawitsky, Tom Taylor, Joe Hassell, Kara Reinhardt Block, Sheri Kassirer, Edward Chazen, Odessa Sanchez.

Call to Order/Confirmation of Participants

Chair Tom Taylor called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the fifth meeting of the Wellesley RIO Task Force. He noted that the meeting was being broadcast on Comcast 9 and Verizon 39 and also streaming live on Wellesley Media for later viewing.

Mr. Taylor confirmed the following participants:

- Task Force members Erin Rielly and Amy Gottschalk joining remotely, with Joan Minklei, Marc Charney, Mary Prosnitz, Mary Kloppenborg, Paul Criswell, Heather Sawitsky, Joe Hassell, Kara Reinhardt Block, Sheri Kassirer, Edward Chazen, Odessa Sanchez, and himself, Tom Taylor.
- Senior Planner, Brad Downey, and Planning Director, Eric Arbeene, joining from Planning Department Staff.

Mr. Taylor noted that member Peter Welburn may join remotely from a plane.

Citizen Speak on Matters Related to the Residential Incentive Overlay Zoning Bylaw

Mr. Taylor explained that this was the first time the Task Force had included citizen speak on the agenda as this is the first time potential changes to the RIO bylaw may be discussed by the Task Force. He allocated 30 minutes for public comments, with each speaker given 3 minutes, though noted it would be primarily a listening session rather than a discussion between the Task Force and the resident speaking.

One attendee who was observing the meeting in person noted that he was not prepared to speak but was simply there to observe the meeting. Mr. Downey checked the conference line and confirmed no callers were waiting to speak.

Approval of Meeting Minutes – 7/15/25 & 8/13/25

The task force reviewed the minutes from July 15 and August 13 meetings.

For the July 15 minutes, Ms. Reinhardt Block noted that Ms. Reilly's name needed to be corrected (spelling: "R-E-I-L-L-Y"). Mr. Taylor suggested a clarification regarding the definition of consensus, whether it should be defined as two-thirds of members present rather than 11 out of 16 members, or two-thirds of the full body.

For the August 13 minutes, Ms. Reinhardt Block noted that a point made by Mr. Chazen about floor area ratio was not adequately reflected in the minutes.

Mr. Criswell motioned in the words of the chair a vote to approve the minutes of July 15 and August 13, 2025, with the edits as mentioned by Ms. Reinhardt Block and Mr. Taylor. Ms. Kloppenborg seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 14-0.

Bylaw Discussion:

a) Section A: Purpose

Mr. Taylor introduced the purpose statement discussion, explaining that the original RIO had a specific purpose statement written for the problem at hand in 1998. The purpose was substantially changed when the bylaw was

rewritten in 2019. He noted that after reviewing numerous other zoning bylaws, it seemed logical to start with purpose statements.

Several task force members presented their ideas for a purpose statement:

Mr. Taylor felt that the primary purpose of RIO should be to create an overlay district that encourages the development of housing at a scale, density, and aesthetic that are compatible with existing surrounding uses to contribute to housing diversity and housing affordability of the town. He emphasized that the purpose statement should focus on the "why" rather than the details, which would be defined elsewhere in the bylaw. He also suggested several subsidiary objectives including placing housing near commercial districts to increase customer base for local business and near town amenities, and transportation to reduce car dependence, adding public amenities, and considering environmentally sound construction, which may be covered by the building code. Mr. Taylor intentionally used less-specific terms like "encourage" and "compatible" to provide flexibility. He also noted that one of the goals of the bylaw is to provide housing for seniors. He noted that he interpreted compatibility and "possible uses" for land as compatible with what is allowed in each zoning district rather than what currently exists on any given site.

Mr. Chazen focused on establishing clear guidelines to reduce uncertainty for developers and anxiety for residents, making the permitting process less contentious. He emphasized opposition is among the greatest risk, but listening to stakeholders and showing examples of successful developments from communities similar to Wellesley should be prioritized. He referenced "The Nines" as a successful high-density development away from already congested areas like Washington Street and Walnut Street.

Ms. Reilly approached the purpose from a more humanistic perspective, focusing on the people who would benefit from diverse housing rather than just the buildings themselves. She emphasized creating housing for a broader range of people including those in various life stages and income levels, such as artists, people in trades, nurses, and others who contribute to the community but may not be able to afford current housing prices in the region, let alone Wellesley.

A brief discussion followed on demand for workforce housing and inclusionary zoning requirements to promote housing options for residents of varying socio-economic status.

Mr. Chazen noted that most opposition to RIO is less about the zoning itself, but the location of the zoning.

Mr. Hassell emphasized "progress" as his key concept, noting how zoning has evolved over time in Wellesley. He focused on facilitating diverse housing stock and economic growth for the town, with emphasis on suitable locations that have appropriate infrastructure support. He acknowledged risks including opposition, perceived property devaluation, traffic concerns, and neighborhood character change, but stressed the importance of modernizing the code to achieve current and future town goals.

Ms. Prosnitz highlighted the importance of redevelopment of existing structures for environmental reasons, focusing on reusing buildings and land rather than developing existing open space. She emphasized different life-cycle housing needs, walkability, and the importance of considering architectural and aesthetic character. She suggested using schools as community centers and proposed creative visualization tools to help residents understand potential changes.

Ms. Kassirer stated that RIO should take advantage of real estate opportunities that otherwise would not be possible through current zoning rules in order to provide more housing options for different life stages, increase affordable housing, and guide growth in appropriate areas. She highlighted the importance of fostering a diverse community that bridges racial, generational, and socio-economic barriers. She noted that African Americans represent only 1.7% of Wellesley's population (and declining), contrasting with demographic projections showing people of color becoming a majority nationally by 2040. She noted Massachusetts' housing crisis and resulting homelessness, and suggested setting specific targets for housing units to be built over time.

Ms. Minklei presented research based on American Enterprise Institute data.

Ms. Sanchez responded to Ms. Kassirer's comments on Wellesley's racial diversity and homelessness, noting that additional housing units are available to everyone, not just African Americans, so additional work would be required to attract racial diversity. She also noted the risks of gentrification.

Mr. Criswell focused on the procedural aspects of the bylaw based on his experience at Town Meeting. He felt the purpose of the RIO bylaw is to enable the development and construction of multi-family housing units in an area where they are otherwise not allowed to exist. He stresses the importance of having future developments

meet Town goals for multi-family housing development. He suggested developing evaluation criteria for RIO proposals to ensure they meet Town goals, to be promulgated by the Planning Board.

Ms. Gottschalk arrived to the meeting in-person at approximately 8:15PM.

Ms. Minklei proposed that the RIO has outlived its usefulness and no longer serves a distinct purpose given the town's as-of-right multi-unit housing zoning districts and the MBTA Communities Act. She suggested that eliminating RIO would streamline zoning bylaws, reduce redundancy, and provide more clarity and certainty. She stated that Wellesley already has 800-1000 additional approved units in the pipeline, but the Town is only obligated to build an additional 664 units.

Mr. Charney suggested removing single-family districts from the RIO Bylaw, which would significantly narrow its scope but potentially address many concerns. He acknowledged the value of the discussion but expressed concern about the timeline, hoping to get proposals to Annual Town Meeting 2026. He mentioned that Wellesley's zoning bylaw needs complete recodification, with RIO being just one small component.

Ms. Gottschalk agreed with Ms. Minklei's idea that the RIO may have outlived its purpose, noting that RIO requires a rezoning process and other zoning tools exist. She suggested that instead of piecemeal RIO approvals, the town should consider changing zoning to planned development in areas like Lower Falls. She emphasized the need for comprehensive planning with input from residents.

Ms. Kloppenberg noted goals focusing on fostering community understanding of Wellesley's unique zoning requirements, supporting planning goals for housing (including access to transportation, shopping, schools, and work), and recognizing implications of changes on neighborhoods and traffic patterns. She emphasizes the importance of community education on housing and zoning.

Ms. Sawitsky stressed the need for education of town meeting members and other community members to develop a shared vision. She agreed with Mr. Charney that eliminating some areas from RIO consideration might help reduce fears. She highlighted the importance of senior housing and suggested creative approaches like placing senior housing near schools for potential synergies.

Ms. Minklei commented on senior housing trends, noting that baby boomers increasingly prefer to remain in their homes and in mixed multi-generational communities rather than dedicated senior facilities, though she acknowledged Wellesley has good examples like Wellesley Green and Glen Grove. She noted that siting senior housing facilities near schools may not be appropriate.

Ms. Reinhardt Block noted that few "workforce" households still exist in her neighborhood. She suggested the Town should prioritize the needs of current residents over the needs of future residents and felt that following permitting projects was too onerous for residents. She noted that zoning provides other avenues to create multi-family housing.

Ms. Sanchez emphasized creating distinctive neighborhood identities through RIO, encouraging mixed usage and business diversity. She referenced examples like Coolidge Corner, Brookline Village, and the South End as places where unique housing coexists with mixed-use development that revitalizes neighborhoods. She suggested updating dimensional regulations, permit reform, and partnerships to meet sustainability goals.

Mr. Arbeene said that Planning Department staff will prepare a document summarizing the thoughts of the Task Force members and distribute it to the group prior to the next meeting.

Mr. Arbeene reviewed the zoning maps and supplementary zoning district information that Planning Department staff prepared for the Task Force. A brief discussion followed on zoning districts in town where by-right multi-family housing can be built.

Task Force Chair Updates

Preview Agenda for Next Meeting

Mr. Taylor discussed plans for the next meeting. There was discussion about a potential additional meeting on September 30. Mr. Arbeene noted that this date worked for most task force members based on a Doodle poll, but staff would investigate alternatives.

There was a discussion to plan for a joint meeting of the RIO Task Force and the Planning Board to hear the Planning Board members' thoughts. Mr. Arbeene noted upcoming Planning Board meeting dates of September 29, October 6, or October 20, which may be suitable for a joint meeting.

Mr. Arbeene provided an update on the Strategic Housing Plan, noting they were unable to get the consultant to attend a Task Force meeting, but encouraged members to review the draft document. He and Mr. Taylor noted that a discussion of the Strategic Housing Plan, while potentially valuable, may conflate the charge of the RIO Task Force into something beyond its scope.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15 PM.

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale – T.Taylor

Purpose Statement

PRIMARY PURPOSE:

- To create an overlay district that encourages the development of housing, at a scale, density and aesthetic that are compatible with existing surrounding uses, to contribute to housing diversity and housing affordability of the Town

OTHER OBJECTIVES: Other goals and objectives can be added to define subsidiary objectives we have for development (see below)

The Opportunity of the Purpose Statement

- PURPOSE is the “why?”, not the details.
 - No hard parameter or rule (like 1 acre minimum) should be defined in the **Purpose Statement**. Define those lower in the bylaw.
 - Purpose becomes an important guide to all what is considered by Planning, ZBA, DRB, and the developer, and citizens
 - LHR is an example of applying 6 criteria, some of them quite fuzzy, to fundamentally guide the permitting and approval.

Supporting Ideas

- OTHER OBJECTIVES *could include*
 - Near commercial districts to create a customer base for Town businesses
 - Near Town amenities/commercial/transportation to incent fewer cars and more walking/biking
 - Adds amenities for public/Town access or enjoyment
 - Goals supporting SENIOR HOUSING options
 - Environmentally sound construction (probably not required)

Strategies later in bylaw after Purpose Statement

- Specific rules / limits, NOT in the Purpose statement
- “ENCOURAGE” – without some incentive, there is no value to having a bylaw. Density enhancement is appropriate.
- “COMPATIBLE WITH ...” – Rules/limits/restrictions later defined in RIO bylaw
 - Density – a function of the underlying district, not a universal 24
 - Location – some definition of where is clarifying and useful
 - Distance from commercial, maybe even abutting for SR
 - Maybe ID specific areas of Town (although that’s limiting).
 - NOT prohibit by zoning district
- No REQUIREMENT for Public Transportation
 - Near train is covered by MBTA Communities
 - Near Bus or Catch Connect too hard to administer. Leave those things as a GOAL but not a REQUIREMENT.

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale	
Presented by Ed Chazen, precinct E	
1. Purpose Statement	2. Risks/ Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide developers with clear guidelines where high(er) density multifamily and mixed-use development can be approved in an efficient permitting process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of neighborhood opposition to potentially greater congestion and change in local neighborhood character Opportunity to create broader housing choices for young families to move to Town and for empty nesters to downsize and continue to live in Town
Summary statement; The Town will benefit from establishing a clear process that ensures best practices in planning for new development;	Summary statement; It is inevitable that community members will have strong opinions that need to be heard; However a well-managed public hearing process can result in a new housing plan that ultimately benefits existing and future residents;
3. Supporting Ideas	4. Risk mitigation strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Nines at The Wellesley Office Park is a successful example of high-density development close to regional highways that does not significantly adversely affect congestion on major Town roads- Washington Street/Central Street, Walnut Street and Linden Street. It is a good template to duplicate, but with more creative land use and building designs to produce more of a local community feel around the new developments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated public hearings and transparency in the process and thought process in rezoning Show several examples in other communities that are similar to Wellesley where such rezoning and high(er) density development has been successful without adversely affecting congestion or fundamentally altering a community's character.
Summary statement; Careful planning and permitting can accomplish the goals of this proposed RIO initiative	Summary statement; It is critical that local community stakeholders be heard and that they have confidence in a transparent zoning process and see that similar communities have successfully implemented similar rezoning initiatives

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale – Temp

Purpose Statement

- Bullet #1 To allow for a more diverse housing stock in Wellesley; to allow for more socio-economic diversity of people in town.
- Bullet #2
- Bullet #3

To promote a town population that includes all levels of income and wealth.

Summary statement

Supporting Ideas

- Bullet #1
- Bullet #2
- Bullet #3 When people can ^{afford to} live close to where they work, you can recruit better people.

Also, having residents who are in the trades, are artists, nurses, caregivers, etc. benefits everyone.

Summary statement

Risks/Opportunities

- Bullet #1 Risks - People will claim that they had to work hard to "get to" live here, and others should, too.
- Bullet #2
- Bullet #3

Opportunities - Having residents from a wider range of income levels will bring much-needed talent, and perspectives.

Summary statement

Risk Mitigation Strategies

- Bullet #1 Point out that the people we interact with on a daily basis in town all need a place to live. - Also, the kids who have grown up in Wellesley do, too!
- Bullet #2
- Bullet #3

Summary statement

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale – Template

Purpose Statement	Risks/Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullet #1• Bullet #2• Bullet #3 <p>To facilitate diverse housing stock and economic growth in strategic locations in Wellesley in Pre-determined locations that can handle increased density and have in place supportive infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullet #1• Bullet #2• Bullet #3 <p>Neighborhood opposition, perceived property devaluation, traffic increase, character change</p>
Summary statement	Summary statement
<p>Supporting Ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullet #1• Bullet #2• Bullet #3 <p>by creating more diverse housing stock we open up options to a variety of different residents in different life cycles (starter, lost middle, your professional, age in place) The more option we have and people shift around the more available and plentiful options.</p>	<p>Risk Mitigation Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullet #1• Bullet #2• Bullet #3 <p>Modernizing the code to achieve current and future housing goals will be good for the towns residents and financial well being. Planning for the future while honoring the past</p>

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale – Kassirer

Purpose Statement

Create an opportunity to take advantage of real estate offerings in a timely way that would otherwise be denied by Wellesley's zoning rules in order to:
To create more housing options for people at different stages of life; encourage affordable housing by requiring projects comply with the Town's inclusionary zoning; guide growth in the right places

It would be wonderful to live in a town where grandparents, parents and children could thrive together

Supporting Ideas

- “201 building permits were issued in 2024 in MA – the sixth lowest rate in the nation (Texas 225,756)
- 190,141 people were homeless in 2024 in MA
- Homelessness is a structural problem not a product of social deviancy – see Homelessness is a Housing Problem by Colburn and Aldren
- African Americans prevalence in MA about 13%; in Wellesley 1.7%

MA and Wellesley have outgrown their zoning rules

Opportunities

- Enhance our ability to have children, parents and grandparents to live in the same community
- Enhance the ability to create a more diverse community across generational, race and socioeconomic barriers
- Participate in solving Massachusetts' housing crisis
- Create a liveable environment

We have a great opportunity and the ability to overcome risks

Risk Mitigation Strategies

- Set specific growth target (perhaps using Healey's goal) and engineer risk mitigation accordingly

(We have a knowledgeable and engaged Planning Board and Town Meeting members)

P. CRISWELL

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale – Template

Purpose Statement

- To provide a vehicle whereby the Town can enable the development and construction of multi-family housing units that meet the Town's criteria and goals for community multi-family development. The RIO Bylaw enables multiple stakeholders – the Town, Developers, Community Organizations etc. to propose such developments

Summary statement

Supporting Ideas

- Develop evaluation criteria
- Achieve broad buy-in from Town residents regarding goals
- Planning Board evaluates proposals based on how they meet the Town's goals
- Base TM presentation on how goals are achieved
- Require commitment to proposal as it relates to goal setting

Summary statement

Risks/Opportunities

- Proponents give short-shrift to meeting goals
- Residents ignore buy-in when presented with actual proposal
- Commitments not deemed binding in the absence of a Development Agreement

Summary statement

Risk Mitigation Strategies

- Achieve as broad a consensus as possible in the absence of a specific proposal
- Planning Board as gate-keeper and proponent
- TM still has final word
- Development Agreement when deemed necessary

Summary statement

RIO Purpose and Rationale Homework
September 8, 2025
Mary Prosnitz

Purpose: to promote redevelopment of existing structures or the creation of new structures for housing or for mixed housing and commercial use

Risk: residents resist change to neighborhood density

Opportunity: chance to develop underused properties and to preserve open space by using already developed land

Supporting Ideas: Better for environment to reuse and recycle, denser housing is more sustainable in the long run

Risk Mitigation Strategies: partner with groups such as Sustainable Wellesley to educate residents about benefits of preserving open space by building only on developed parcels

Purpose: to create varieties of housing types for households having a mixture of needs and income levels

Risk: residents object to change from majority single family zoning to more areas having multi family zoning

Opportunity: enhance the town by creating more family starter homes, senior homes and affordable homes

Supporting Ideas: towns are more vibrant with diverse age, family sizes and household income; less traffic if more people can work and live in same town

Risk Mitigation Strategies: emphasize need for senior homes and for participation in statewide need for more homes

Purpose: to promote housing in areas that enhance the walkability of neighborhoods by building near schools, parks, shops and services

Risk: walkability may not entirely offset increased vehicle traffic

Opportunity: enhancement of village character of neighborhoods

Supporting Ideas: people prefer to live in walkable communities and may be willing to pay extra to live in such a community

Risk Management Strategies: educate residents about concept and desirability of the 15 minute city

Purpose: to promote housing created from new or redeveloped structures that preserve the architectural and aesthetic character of the town

Risk: may be too costly to replicate style of older homes in town

Opportunity: preservation of the visual character of town may encourage more resident acceptance of change to more multi family housing

Supporting Ideas: uniform look for town structures gives the town a unique aspect

Risk Management Strategies: allow creative approach to styles found in town and promote displays of renderings that show the aesthetic conformity of proposed structures

RIO Purpose Statement & Rationale

Joan Minkley

Purpose Statement:

- The RIO has outlived its usefulness and no longer serves a distinct purpose.
- With as-of-right Multi-Unit Housing zoning districts now in place and the MBTA Communities Act the objectives of the RIO are already addressed more directly and predictably.
- Retiring the RIO streamlines our zoning bylaws, removes redundancy, and provides clarity to property owners, town boards, and residents.

Summary:

The RIO is no longer necessary given that as-of-right multifamily and mixed-use zoning already achieves its objectives. Eliminating the RIO simplifies the zoning framework and provides clarity for both applicants and residents.

Supporting Ideas:

- Massachusetts faces a shortage of approximately 193,000 housing units; Wellesley's shortage is estimated to be 7%, our proportional share of that shortage is 664 units.*
- Wellesley currently has @9,428 housing units and almost 1,000 additional units approved and in the pipeline, including the 180 at Mass Bay, 675 at The Nines (Phase III, raised the cap from 850 to 1,025 total units), 28 units at 49 Walnut Street, and 34 at 192/194 Worcester Street.
- These developments alone more than cover Wellesley's share of the statewide housing shortfall, showing that our housing goals can be achieved without reliance on the RIO.
- The RIO requires Town Meeting approval and special permits which adds time, uncertainty, and potential inconsistency in outcomes.
- Removing the RIO eliminates confusion for applicants and allows the Planning Board and Design Review Board to focus on clear, predictable standards.

Summary:

Wellesley is already on track to meet or exceed its proportional housing obligations through existing projects. Eliminating the RIO will not slow housing production but will remove redundancy and create a clearer, more predictable zoning system.

Risks/Opportunities:

- Opportunity: Eliminating the RIO removes a parallel, duplicative permitting track, reducing complexity and uncertainty.
- Opportunity: Greater predictability for both developers and residents strengthens confidence in the town's zoning framework.
- Risk: Minimal: the bylaw's objectives are already met through existing zoning mechanisms. Wellesley already has many hundreds of approved units in the pipeline, so our housing goals will be met without relying on the RIO.

Summary:

Removing the RIO presents more opportunity than risk: it eliminates redundancy, reduces complexity, and ensures greater predictability in permitting. The risk of removal is minimal since existing zoning tools already meet community housing and reuse needs.

Risk Mitigation Strategies:

- Because Wellesley's pipeline of approved projects already exceeds our 664-unit proportional share of the statewide shortage, removing the RIO poses no risk of underproduction..
- Instead, elimination reduces legal and procedural risks by removing a duplicative bylaw that confuses applicants and consumes Planning Board and Town Meeting resources.
- All housing and reuse opportunities intended under the RIO are still achievable through as-of-right zoning districts and overlays already adopted.
- Predictability, clarity, and alignment with state law serve as built-in mitigations for community concerns.
- Housing growth will continue through existing as-of-right zones and overlays that are already aligned with state requirements.

Summary:

Removing the RIO is itself a form of risk mitigation, ensuring clarity, predictability, and efficient governance while maintaining steady housing growth.. By relying on as-of-right zoning tools, the town lowers legal and procedural risks while offering residents and developers a more predictable system. The town's existing pipeline and zoning tools provide more than enough capacity to meet our housing needs.

* Per American Enterprise Institute Housing Center: https://heat.aeihousingcenter.org/toolkit/housing_shortage.

A. GOTTSCHALK

In thinking about the RIO's purpose I considered walkability by researching geriatric, NIH and NTHS studies about perceived versus actual distances and safety conditions, distance decay for daily life showing people are less willing to walk distances for dining (decay doubles between .25-.5) and shopping (decay triples between .25-.5) and more willing to walk .75 miles for work and over a mile for recreation. I also considered what other countries have done and read several studies about dense living and life circles in Japan (which has the largest share of older adults in the world) and China. The methodology of "production first, life second" has proven to create issues for them, especially as it has related to senior housing and the desire for seniors to want to be active in their communities.

But, the more I came back to the density a RIO encourages, the more I felt the purpose for a RIO does not exist.

By-right builds give us density

With the exception of land designated for administrative, professional, educational, or town-owned purposes—such as the North 40, parks, and conservation areas—current bylaws in Wellesley permit by-right construction of multi-family housing. Most of the applicable zoning districts allow for a density of 17.4 units per acre, which exceeds the 15 units per acre required under the MBTA Communities Act.

Historically, the Residential Incentive Overlay (RIO) has been applied under exceptional circumstances: for instance, to facilitate the approval of the Waterstone assisted living facility and to manage the town's response to the hostile 40B situation, resulting in the Bristol and Terrazza developments. However, the RIO is increasingly being used not as a tool for managing unusual cases, but as a way to circumvent intentional and comprehensive zoning practices.

Handling potential future 40B situations

We have instituted inclusionary zoning of 20%, which we did not have before.

Rezoning instead of "piecemealing" with RIO

Most recently a set of RIOs were attempted in Newton Lower Falls with one on Washington Street and one on Walnut. Rather than relying on this piecemeal approach, the area would benefit from a plan, a planned development. The same is true elsewhere in town....Cedar Street intersection, the Gateway on the north side of 9, 888 Worcester.

Though the RIO is technically an overlay district, in practice, it functions as a form of rezoning. When residential is layered over another zone such as business, the shift is often permanent; reverting a parcel back to business use is unlikely. For example, 150 Cedar/192–194 Worcester began as a split zone but will now remain residential with the 34 units.

If the intent is to designate a parcel solely for multi-family housing, it should be rezoned accordingly. If the goal is to blend residential and commercial uses, the area should be rezoned as mixed-use. RIO requires TMM approval. All rezoning requires TMM approval. Removing a RIO does not take the power out of TMM hands.

Furthermore, there are other zoning tools that exist for the development of dense housing (i.e. chapter 40, special permits).

Resident ownership and engagement

Wellesley is in essence comprised of village neighborhoods. Residents are drawn to these distinct communities and should have a voice in shaping the future of their precincts. Inclusive planning fosters civic engagement, creates some excitement around what could be and strengthens community ties. Do the type of vertical, dense buildings a RIO encourages help those we are trying to attract to come to Wellesley? Families who move here are looking for front doors and back yards. Not all downsizers are looking for vertical independent or assisted living. Zero lot line homes are great for seniors wanting smaller spaces with little maintenance.

Plenty of units

As it stands, Wellesley has already exceeded its 10% affordable housing requirement and has zoned for over 650 more units than mandated by the MBTA Communities Act. Additionally, numerous projects have been approved but are not yet constructed, including The Nines. Projects at 150 Cedar/192–194 Worcester (34 units) and 49 Walnut Street (28 units) are underway. Furthermore, the MassBay site is expected to bring approximately 180 units.